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# **The Philippines: Exploring Views on the US Military Bases**

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**Memorandum**

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## SUMMARY

Philippine public opinion will probably play an unprecedented role in negotiations between Manila and Washington about the future of US bases at Clark and Subic, especially since the new Constitution specifies that a new military bases agreement that must be negotiated by 1991 may also be submitted to a referendum. A variety of polls indicates a majority of Filipinos support the continued presence of the US military facilities and a national plebiscite now would probably reflect that sentiment. Nonetheless, poll results also suggest widespread ignorance and ambivalence about aspects of the bases, such as the perceived increased risk of nuclear attack. Between now and 1991, the Philippine leaders who will determine the terms of a new agreement and the public who will ultimately accept or reject it are susceptible to well-directed propaganda campaigns by either side that play to the public's concerns on such issues as sovereignty, the economic impact, or nuclear weapons. [ ]

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## Filipinos on the Bases--A Sampling of Public Opinion

"It is the United States that needs the bases more. I would not simply say let the United States do its own thing, that we want to be free from this. We can't even if we wished to. We have five to six years and within that time let's see what happens to (Russian and US arms talks). We are not makers of our own destiny."--Ambassador to the US Emmanuel Pelaez. [ ]

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"They (the bases) are helpful. If the bases were not there many Filipinos would lose their jobs. Many Filipinos benefit from them."--Manila security guard. [ ]

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[redacted]

"I hear that Filipinos are treated as second-class citizens inside the bases. We are like foreigners inside our own country....It is also true what they say that the military bases are under Filipino command only superficially and ceremonially. We have to have equality. Even if they pay millions for rent we should have sovereignty in our country."--Manila university student. [redacted]

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"We are afraid of war....I wonder if the bases are for our defense, or are they...(going to) embroil us in another war."--Mita Pardo de Tavera, now Secretary of Social Welfare. [redacted]

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"We all know [sic] that the US pays rental for its bases in Spain, Greece, Turkey, and where have you. Why are we Filipinos getting the short end of the stick?...It's time to cut ourselves fully free from the apron strings of America."--Columnist Max Soliven. [redacted]

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Philippine public opinion surveys on the bases are scarce, and most of them predate the Aquino administration. Almost all the polls reviewed, however, show a generally positive attitude toward the bases. Polls taken in 1985 and 1986 show that across age groups, educational levels, and for both urban and rural areas, the majority believe the bases should be kept or even expanded. The most recent data, from June 1987, show a substantial majority of the population favor retaining the US facilities--at least under certain circumstances--with only a small minority of respondents believing that the military bases agreement should be allowed to lapse or be terminated. [redacted]

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Attitudes on the base-related issues appear to vary with education. Respondents with no more than a high school education were most strongly committed to the bases. Polls suggest that the better educated--a group believed to be more representative of Philippine decisionmakers--are the group most critical of the basing arrangements, however. Respondents with only an elementary school education generally appear to be less opinionated on these issues. [redacted]

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When asked to indentify the benefits of the bases to the Philippines, the majority of all respondents in the polls examined saw a definite economic and security advantage to the US military presence. However, Filipinos in all groups are clearly concerned by the added risk of nuclear attack they believe the bases represent. Sixty-eight percent of the Manila respondents in a June poll said that the bases added at least a

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fair amount to the risk of being a target. Findings from a 1985 poll are similar; 57 to 75 percent linked the bases with an increased risk of nuclear attack. University-educated respondents registered the highest rate of concern. [redacted]

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The polls further indicated that older respondents, rural interviewees, and those who had attended only elementary school often responded by saying they "did not know. (1) This distinction is most evident in the responses to questions in a 1985 poll asking if the bases are worth the risks they involve. About 30 percent of these groups responded that they did not know. [redacted]

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#### Filling in the Gaps--Filipinos' Views on The Issues

The probases view of the majority probably conceals many underlying attitudes on the bases issue. Filipinos' opinions of the US military installations probably are a mixture of attitudes about several core issues involving sovereignty and the US role in the Philippine economy, with security concerns playing a secondary role. [redacted]

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National sovereignty. Sovereignty is probably the single most important issue dividing opponents and supporters of the bases. Probases Filipinos argue that the bases are the result of an agreement between two sovereign states, and point to US concessions to Manila's sensitivities during earlier reviews of the agreement as signs of good faith. During the 1970s, for example, Washington reduced the area under US control at both Clark Air Base and Subic Bay, and also conceded that the US bases are within Philippine facilities under a Philippine military commander. [redacted]

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To antibase Filipinos, however, the bases are overt symbols of their country's close--some would say stifling--connection to its former ruler. They argue that symbolic concessions do not alter the fact that the agreement allows the United States "unhampered" use for military operations, and because Manila has no control over US activities at the facilities, the bases violate sovereignty. Some nationalists worry that Washington could use the bases in a manner inimical to Philippine interests and without Manila's approval, such as to backstop operations in the Middle East. [redacted]

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The left, including the Communist Party, argues that the bases are Trojan horses, allowing Washington to intervene at will in Philippine affairs. Accusations in the local press

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[redacted]

about alleged [redacted] activities launched from the bases help to confirm these fears. In addition, opponents believe that preservation of the bases so dominated US relations with the Marcos government that the US turned a blind eye to Marcos's self-enrichment, and that continuing a relationship based so strongly on the bases only presages a similar "US-Aquino dictatorship." [redacted]

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The provisions that give the United States primary legal jurisdiction over US personnel and offenses against the United States or US personnel and their dependents are another facet of the military bases agreement that many Filipinos view as an affront to Philippine sovereignty. The United States uses similar procedures with its NATO allies, but some Filipinos view these arrangements as a criticism of their judicial system and a reminder of their former colonial status. This perception is inflamed by sensationalist press exposes on alleged criminal behavior by US personnel or brutality against local Filipinos.

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Economic considerations. Data suggest that most Filipinos agree hosting the US bases makes good economic sense. In addition to bringing in nearly \$200 million a year in economic and military assistance, the bases are the second-largest employer in the country, after the Philippine Government itself. There are approximately 40,000 jobs for Filipinos on Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base, plus sizable offbase employment generated by the US presence. It is estimated that, all told, the bases add over \$500 million a year to the Philippine economy, an amount equivalent to about 1.5 percent of national income. Closing the bases, supporters say, would lead to a surge in unemployment--a concern echoed by working class Filipinos recently interviewed. [redacted]

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Many opponents believe the economic argument exaggerates the value of the bases. They argue that the US installations spawn a "brothel economy" of bars, prostitution, and narcotics trafficking rather than solid development, while increasing the country's dependence on aid and "other hand-outs" from the United States. In any event, most Filipinos are probably embarrassed by the tacky sprawl outside the US facilities, and those opposed to the bases see Olongapo and Angeles City as miniature examples of the Philippines' "distorted" economic relationship with the United States. Antibase Filipinos also argue that the bases' removal would not be an economic calamity

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[REDACTED]

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because industrial development at the same sites could absorb the former employees and allow the Philippines to pursue "truly independent" economic development. [REDACTED]

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Mutual Defense and Security Issues. Defense Secretary Ilego has argued publicly that the US military presence provides a security umbrella for the Philippines that Manila cannot afford to develop. A strong majority of Filipinos--between 70 and 80 percent, depending on how the question is formulated--appear to agree that the bases deter foreign aggression. [REDACTED]

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Nevertheless, press reports [REDACTED] indicate skepticism in some segments of the population about the value of the bases to Philippine defense. Many Filipinos--including some senior officials and legislators--are so preoccupied with their country's internal problems that they doubt that there is, or will be in the near future, a credible external threat. [REDACTED]

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Opponents of the bases also argue that if Manila allows the storage of nuclear weapons at the US facilities, then the Philippines is in danger of a nuclear accident or a nuclear attack. Although propaganda from the Soviets and the Philippine radical left fans these anxieties, they are made plausible by Japanese attacks on US military installations in Central Luzon during World War II, and nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. [REDACTED]

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From the standpoint of internal security, some Filipinos may view the bases as assurance that the United States would intervene militarily if the Communists appeared on the brink of victory. A significant number may believe that the removal of the bases would allow the Communists to take over. [REDACTED]

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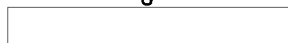
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Footnote

1. The 1980 Philippine census indicated that about 64 percent of the population lived in rural areas. Based on data extrapolated from the 1980 census, it is estimated that the over-40 age group will constitute about 20 percent of the population in 1990. Current statistics on the number of people who have completed only primary education are unavailable, but 1980 data indicate that about 65 percent of the adult population would fall into this category.



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